UP in the BLENHEIM

A Civilian Pilot's Impressions as a Passenger in Our Fastest Bomber : Simplified Docility : Its Transport Ancestry.

By H. A. TAYLOR

UNTIL a matter of a year ago it was customary for the all-knowing ones, both inside and outside the aircraft industry, to point to America as the country where real aircraft development, in design, production and performance, was to be found. On the face of the matter such an implied accusation would then have been true enough, since progress usually occurs spasmodically and the American industry had simply received the necessary financial encouragement a year or two before ours.

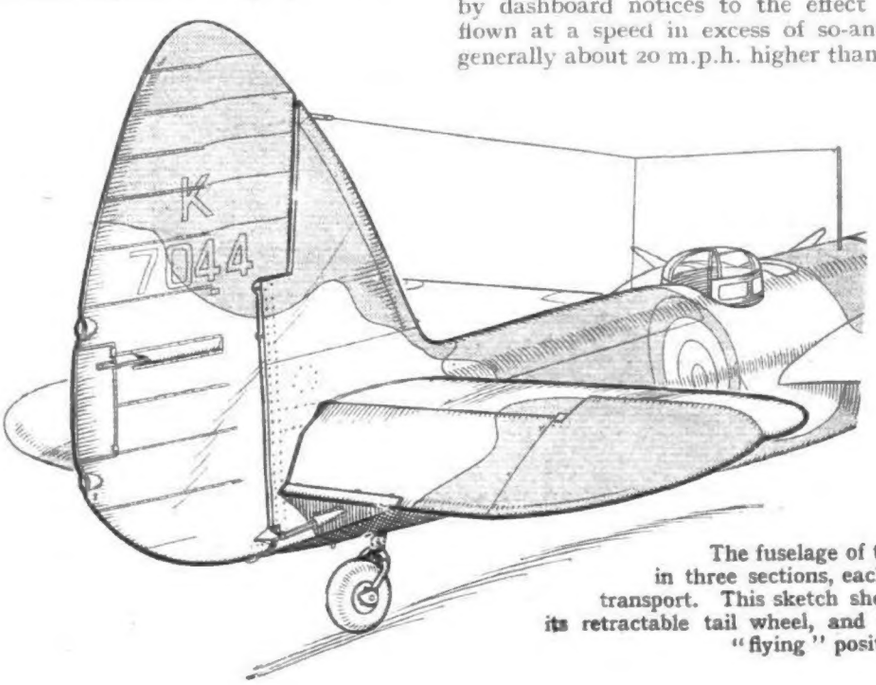
The fact that we can better the performance in the same conditions is now being adequately proved. As far as the general public is concerned, the most notable result of modern design and production is the Short Empire boat, but now that details of some of the more modern military machines are being released they are learning something of what can be done when the demand—and the wherewithal—is there.

For many reasons the Bristol Blenheim may be taken as the most representative example of the modern trend and is all the more interesting because it was directly developed from a normal civil type—the 142, or *Britain First*. A third machine on similar lines, the 143, has been designed purely for transport work, but has inevitably been put on one side while the Bristol organisation got down to rapid production of the more urgently required Blenheims.

Since this machine will be one of the most interesting types to be seen for the first time at the Display in Service form, and since it is, virtually, a high-speed transport redesigned for military use, some impressions of the machine from the civilian pilot's point of view should be of interest to a number of people. Needless to say, the demand is so great that each machine as it comes off the assembly line is test-flown and delivered almost straight away to its squadron; Blenheims do not hang about at Filton. However, with the considerable assistance of the Bristol Company and of one of the London Club's Hornets it was possible to get over to Filton within three hours of the reception of a telephone message to the effect that one of them would be making its final acceptance flight that afternoon. Only one machine in ten is equipped with dual, and this one was not, but, sitting beside Flt. Lt. C. F. Uwins, the Company's chief test pilot, one could learn something of the machine's flying characteristics and discover the sequence of control operations.

To the entirely uninitiated the control cabin of a modern twin-engined machine is something of a mysterious bag of tricks, but one lives and learns; in comparison with some transport machines of which I have had experience, the Blenheim's control layout is delightfully simplified. Everything is placed where it should logically be placed, and the pilot has merely to memorise the logical sequence of a series of actions while preparing either for the take-off or the approach and landing.

So far as flying is concerned, the civil-trained pilot would suffer two mild shocks in the Blenheim. First, the take-off acceleration is of the catapult order and the actual run is not much more than 300 yards. One does not expect that sort of thing in a comparatively large aeroplane. Secondly, the normal climb at about 140 m.p.h. is such that the "minute" hand of the Kollsman sensitive altimeter goes round like that of a clock with a broken escapement. Furthermore, though the machine is not really designed to be flung about, the pilot is not worried by dashboard notices to the effect that it must not be flown at a speed in excess of so-and-so miles an hour—generally about 20 m.p.h. higher than the normal maximum in high-efficiency civil machines. No doubt, however, reasonable care must be exercised, even in the case of the Blenheim. As far as noise is concerned, we of the civilian fraternity have been spoiled by the decibel-chasers. The Blenheim is just a flying machine, with no comforts,



The fuselage of the Blenheim is made in three sections, each of a size suitable for transport. This sketch shows the tail unit with its retractable tail wheel, and the rear turret in its "flying" position.